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CIA link to Iraq reported

From Chicago Tribune wires

WASHINGTON—The CIA secretly has given Iraq detailed information to assist Iraqi bombing raids on Iran's oil terminals and power plants in the Persian Gulf war, a published report says.

The Washington Post, in Monday's editions, quoted unidentified sources as saying the United States has supplied the intelligence, including data from U.S. satellite reconnaissance photography, to Iraq for nearly two years.

During the same period, the Reagan administration was covertly selling arms to Iran in hopes of freeing the American hostages in Lebanon and gaining influence with moderate factions in the Iranian government.

One source told the Post the intelligence is "vital" to Iraq's conduct of the war.

White House spokesman Pete Roussel said Sunday night he would have no comment on the report. "We don't comment on intelligence matters," he said.

The Post reported that the CIA stepped up the initiative with Iraq in August by establishing a direct link between Washington and Baghdad to provide the Iraqis with better and more timely satellite information. With the link, the Iraqis could receive the data from satellite photos "several hours" after a bombing raid to assess the damage and plan the next attack, the newspaper quoted one source as saying.

The Post also quoted sources as saying CIA Director William Casey met in October and November with Iraqi officials to make sure the new link was functioning and to encourage more attacks on Iranian installations.

Since summer, Iraq has flown raids against Iran almost daily, bombing refineries, oil fields, petrochemical plants, factories, power stations, railroads, bridges and military bases.

The Iraqi raids have been devastating to Iran, which until a few months ago appeared dominant in the 6-year-old Persian Gulf war.

The Iranians, who rely on oil revenues to pay for the war, have not been able to combat the offensive because they have few operational planes and have lacked spare parts for their largely U.S.-made air defenses.

Without air cover, they cannot launch their much-vaunted "final offensive," despite having massed an estimated 650,000 soldiers along the front.